

**Screening Form**  
**Low-Effect Incidental Take Permit Determination and**  
**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**  
**Environmental Action Statement**

**I. HCP Information**

**A. HCP Name:** La Purisima Golf Course Solar Array Project Habitat Conservation Plan

**B. Affected Species:**

California tiger salamander (CTS; Santa Barbara distinct population segment)

**C. HCP Size (in stream miles and/or acres):**

The land proposed for coverage in this HCP is approximately 3 acres of grassland habitat in northern Santa Barbara County near Lompoc, California.

**D. Brief Project Description (including minimization and mitigation plans):**

The Applicant proposes to install a 250 kilowatt ground-mounted photovoltaic solar panel array. The Applicant would mount the array on approximately 400 piles. The Applicant would install 2-inch piles using either a vibratory hammer or a Cast-In-Drilled-Hole approach. The Applicant would then mount rails on these piles and install the photovoltaic solar panels and associated wiring on these rails.

The Applicant would also install a 1-foot-wide, 400-feet-long, and 300-feet deep trench containing a 4-inch electrical conduit to transmit generated power from the array to the golf course facility. The trench would predominately follow existing disturbed features. Following installation of the conduit, the Applicant would backfill the trench and restore the trench footprint to its previous state.

The proposed HCP area is approximately 3 acres and is located in a rural, primarily agricultural area. The covered lands are bordered by State Highway 246 to the south, the existing La Purisima golf course to the north and east, and agricultural lands to the west.

The CTS is not known to breed in the HCP project area. However, the species is known to breed within 1.24 miles (CTS dispersal distance) of the proposed project area. Therefore, the species may migrate through the project area to move to and from suitable upland habitat.

Goals and objectives for covered species

Goal 1: Avoid and minimize take, in the form of injury or mortality, of CTS

Objective 1.1: Develop and conduct a pre-construction worker environmental awareness program (WEAP)

A Service approved biologist with knowledge and experience with CTS and their habitats will conduct a pre-activity environmental education/training session for all field personnel. Topics will include field identification of CTS; its regulatory status and the reason(s) for its decline; the laws and codes that regulate this species; the protection measures specified in the HCP that must be followed to minimize impacts to this species; and the limits of work areas, designated access routes, and staging areas. This WEAP will be repeated as necessary for new workers to the Project site.

Objective 1.2: Conduct pre-construction surveys for CTS

A Service approved biologist will conduct pre-construction reconnaissance surveys to identify suitable habitat or individual CTS that may be present within the project area prior to the commencement of activities that could result in take of the species. The objective of pre-construction survey is to identify any CTS within the project area and relocate them to nearby suitable habitat as well as identify any resources within the project area that the destruction of could result in the take of CTS.

Objective 1.3: Conduct daily biological clearances and construction monitoring

Daily pre-activity surveys will be conducted in the project area for open trenches and excavations, exclusion fences, debris and equipment stock piles and for all equipment to ensure no CTS have migrated into the project area. Construction work and ground-disturbing work will not be initiated until the biologist has completed the daily biological clearance. The Service approved biologist will remain onsite and be present during the installation of construction fencing and ground-disturbing activities including grading and excavation activities (e.g., clearing of vegetation and stripping of the surface soil layer) to monitor for the presence of CTS. Upon completion of site preparation and grading activities, the biologist will be available to check on the site or move listed species if necessary.

Objective 1.4: Employ Stop Work Authority and Relocate any observed CTS

If CTS are encountered within the project area during work activities, they will be relocated to the nearest suitable habitat out of the work area by a Service approved biologist. The biologist will have the authority to order any reasonable measure necessary to avoid injury or mortality of CTS and to stop any work or activity that is not in compliance with the conditions set forth in the HCP. The Services' Ventura Office will be notified within 24 hours of any relocation or "stop work" order and this order will remain in effect until the issue has been resolved, or the animal has moved out of the work area on its own.

### Avoidance and minimization measures

- All workers will attend an environmental education/training session before working in the Action Area. Crews will be regularly briefed on changes in seasonal conditions and required conservation measures.
- Limit construction to the dry season (April through October) when CTS are less likely to be mobile.
- Work should be postponed if chance of rain is greater than 70 percent based on the NOAA National Weather Service forecast or within 48 hours following a rain event greater than 0.1 inch.
- Pre-construction surveys within the project area by Service approved biologists will occur within 14-days of initiating work.
- All workers will attend daily tailgate briefings regarding the day's work, safety, and special-status species, required impact avoidance and minimization measures, stop work authority and changing conditions.
- A Service-approved biological monitor will be present during any ground disturbance activities.
- All open trenches and excavations will be ramped to provide a means of escape (earthen ramps not more than 2:1 slope). All trenches, pipes, culverts or similar structures will be inspected for animals prior to burying, capping, moving, or filling.
- The biological monitor will conduct daily pre-activity biological clearances prior to the start of an activity that may affect CTS habitat.
- Trash will be picked up daily and disposed of in appropriate trash containers with a lid.
- All pipe stock and construction materials will be stored above- ground and/or have covers on all openings.
- Should CTS be observed within the project area, work in that area will cease until CTS have been allowed to move out of harm's way of its own accord. If a CTS does not move out of harm's way on its own, then it will be relocated to the nearest suitable habitat away from the work area by a Service approved biologist. Only approved biologists are allowed to handle listed species.
- Equipment refueling and/or liquid changes will occur outside of riparian corridors, wetlands, and at least 100 feet from any surface waters. If any fuel or hazardous waste leaks or spills occur, the repair and cleanup by qualified individuals will be completed as soon as it is safe to do so.
- The disturbance area associated with each work activity will be minimized to the extent practicable.

### Mitigation measures

The Applicant is proposing to allow Service-approved biologists access to ponds on the existing golf course to perform surveys using minnow traps. The purpose of these surveys would be to detect the presence of invasive barred tiger salamanders in the area. The Applicant would also provide a one-time payment of \$10,000 to fund survey work. This would support recovery goals as described in the final recovery plan (Service 2016).

### Monitoring

One of the biological objectives states daily pre-activity surveys will track compliance with the HCP and ITP and also help to identify any take of CTS, meeting the objectives of monitoring (1) and (2) above. Documentation of compliance with the terms and conditions of the HCP will be provided in annual and final reports.

**II. Does the HCP fit the following Department of Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service categorical-exclusion criteria?** *The answer must be "yes" to all three questions below for a positive determination. Each response should include an explanation. If the answer is "no" to any question, the action cannot be categorically excluded, and an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared.*

**A. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and their habitats covered under the HCP?** [516 DM 8.5(C)(2); HCP Handbook] *Consider the degree or amount of take and the impact of that take on the species. Although take may occur under project implementation, after the minimization and mitigation measures proposed in the HCP are done, the impacts must be so minor as to result in negligible effects to the species (516 DM 8).*

Yes, the effects of the HCP are minor on the federally listed CTS and its habitat. The proposed project area is a very small area compared to the amount of suitable CTS habitat within the metapopulation.

**B. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources (e.g. air quality, geology and soils, water quality and quantity, socio-economic, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, environmental justice, etc.), prior to implementation of the minimization and mitigation measures?** [40 CFR 1508.14; 43CFR 46.205; HCP Handbook] *We do not consider a CatEx for these human environment factors; the Service's primary authority is to laws under their jurisdiction. If the HCP includes minimization and mitigation measures for these other components as part of their project, we can enforce compliance by requiring in the permit that permittees fully implement their HCP.*

Yes, the effects on the HCP are minor and negligible on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources. The project would have negligible effects to air quality, geology and soils, water quality and quantity, socio-economic, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, environmental justice, etc.

**C. Would the incremental impacts of this HCP, considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions) *not* result, over time, in a cumulative effects to the human environment (the natural and physical environment) which would be considered significant? [40 CFR 1508.7; 43CFR 46.205; HCP Handbook]**

Yes, the incremental impacts of this HCP, considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions) would not result, over time, in a cumulative effects to the human environment which would be considered significant. Any present and future projects that may occur in the vicinity of the permit area must include, when appropriate, minimization measures and mitigation that will minimize and avoid effects to environmental resources and listed species

**III. Do any of the exceptions to categorical exclusions (extraordinary circumstances) listed in 43 CFR 46.215 apply to this HCP?** *If the answer is "yes" to any of the questions below, the permit action cannot be categorically excluded from additional NEPA analysis, and an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared. Each "no" response should include an explanation.*

**Would implementation of the HCP:**

**A. Have significant impacts on public health or safety?**

No, the project would have no implications on the health and/or safety of the public.

**B. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as: historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990) or floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds, eagles, or other ecologically significant or critical resources?**

No, the project would not have any significant impacts on natural resources and/or unique geographic characteristics such as: historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990) or floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds, eagles, or other ecologically significant or critical resources because none occur within the covered lands of the HCP.

**C. Have highly controversial environmental effects (defined at 43 CFR 46.30), or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [see NEPA section 102(2)(E)]?**

No, the project does not have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.

**D. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?**

No, the project does not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

**E. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?**

No, the project does not establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

**F. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?**

No, the project does not have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects because the proposed project does not have direct relationship to any other actions.

**G. Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places?**

No, the project does not have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places because none occur within the covered lands of the HCP.

**H. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species?** *Consider the degree or amount of take and the impact of the take on the species. Although take may occur under project implementation, it must be so minor as to result in negligible species effects after minimization and mitigation measures have been completed. The same concept applies when considering effects to critical habitat.*

No, the proposed project would not have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species. The proposed project area is a very small area compared to the amount of suitable CTS habitat within the metapopulation.

**I. Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law, or a requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.**

No, the project would not violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law, or a requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

**J. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).**

No, the project would not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.

**K. Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).**

No, the project would not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites because these sites do not exist on site.

**L. Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).**

No, the project would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species. Alternatively, the project would result in the removal of noxious weeds.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT


Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record.

Based on the information and analysis above, I determine that the proposed Incidental Take Permit for La Purisima Golf Course Solar Array Project HCP qualifies for a categorical exclusion, as defined in 40 CFR 1508.4 and in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *Habitat Conservation Planning Handbook*. Furthermore, no extraordinary circumstances identified in 43 CFR 46.215 exist for the La Purisima Golf Course Solar Array Project HCP. Therefore, the Service's permit action for La Purisima Golf Course Solar Array Project HCP is categorically excluded from further NEPA review and documentation, as provided by 40 CFR 1507.3; 43 CFR 46.205; 43 CFR 46.215; 516 DM 3; 516 DM 8.5; and 550 FW 3.3C. A more extensive NEPA process is unwarranted, and no further NEPA documentation will be made.

Other supporting documents:

La Purisima Golf Course Solar Array Project Habitat Conservation Plan

Signature Approval:

  
Stephen P. Henry  
Field Supervisor  
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

8/1/17  
Date